DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 812 RC 022 400

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Carpenter, Vicki |
| TITLE | Neither Objective nor Neutral? Reflecting on My Subjectivity throughout the Research Process in Takiwa School. |
| PUB DATE | 1999-12-00 |
| NOTE | 14p.; Paper presented at the Joint Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (Melbourne, Australia, November 29-December 2, 1999). |
| AVAILABLE FROM | For full text: http://www.swin.edu.au/aare/. |
| PUB TYPE | Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Educational Researchers; Educational Sociology; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethics; Ethnography; Foreign Countries; *Objectivity; Personal Narratives; *Qualitative Research; *Rural Schools; *School Community Relationship; Small Schools |
| IDENTIFIERS | New Zealand; *Researcher Subject Relationship |

ABSTRACT

An educational researcher describes and reflects on a qualitative research project she conducted, focusing on her positioning, neutrality, and objectivity throughout the research process and during subsequent data analysis. The research took place in a K-12 school in a remote rural New Zealand community inhabited by Maori, 1970s "hippies," and more recent arrivals seeking an "alternative" lifestyle away from urban areas. The research focused on the politics of the development of a progressivist, alternative learning unit within the school, promoted primarily by newcomer parents. The researcher had been a teacher and associate principal in the school for 4 years, then went to a university and was immersed in the discipline of educational sociology for 4 years; thus she came to the project with both insider and outsider status and perspective. This paper discusses the project's interpretivist methodology, the researcher's commitment to community empowerment through participative problem solving, research ethics, the assets and liabilities of the insider perspective, and whether objectivity is possible in research. The conclusion contends that although this research has validity, the researcher's positioning and resources make it impossible for the thesis to be fully objective or fully neutral. It is suggested that other educational researchers, despite claims to the contrary, are also neither fully objective nor fully neutral in their research practices. (Contains 31 references.) (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 440 812

# Neither objective nor neutral? Reflecting on my subjectivity throughout the research process in Takiwa School[1].

**Vicki Carpenter, Auckland College of Education**

Refereed paper, presented at the AARE - NZARE Conference Nov/Dec 1999, Melbourne, Australia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Vicki Carpenter
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

RC022400

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# Neither objective nor neutral? Reflecting on my subjectivity throughout the research process in Takiwa School[1].

**Vicki Carpenter, Auckland College of Education**

Refereed paper, presented at the AARE - NZARE Conference Nov/Dec 1999, Melbourne, Australia

## Introduction

From 1994 until 1998 I spent a significant amount of time in a school I call 'Takiwa School'[2] involved in qualitative research for my forthcoming PhD. Access to the research site was eased by the fact that I had previously taught in the school for three years, during 1986, 1987 and 1989.

This paper reflects on my positioning in the research process. Very little has been written about the ethics involved in conducting qualitative or quantitative research in New Zealand schools. As pre-service, in-service and post-graduate education courses expand in New Zealand, more and more teachers will become involved in the research process. My hope is that this paper will contribute to ongoing reflection on the part of educational researchers regarding their own positions in the research process.

The paper opens with a general description of Takiwa, Takiwa School, and the surrounding community. My research is positioned within this context. I then share a little about myself, including my historical and current connections to Takiwa and its inhabitants. This is followed by a brief summary of the theory which was utilised to explain and understand the process of change in Takiwa School. The largest section of this paper examines selected aspects of the project I was involved in. Particular emphasis is on issues to do with my positioning, neutrality and objectivity throughout the research process and the subsequent analysis of data. In the conclusion I contend that although my work has validity, my positioning and resources mean it is not possible for the thesis to be fully objective or fully neutral. I suggest that other educational researchers, despite claims to the contrary, are also neither fully objective nor fully neutral in their research practices.

## The context and the research

Travel to Takiwa, a relatively isolated and rural community, involves a three to four hour drive from Auckland. The settlement is spread over an area encompassing a harbour, exposed coastal zones, riverways, and hillsides covered in native bush. The environment is relatively unpolluted, and beautiful. In Tonnies' terminology Takiwa encompasses aspects of both *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, with more emphasis on the former. That is to say Takiwa has a sense of community not found in urban areas. In Tonnies' (1955) terms there is a genuine form of living together.

Takiwa's population comprises mainly *Maori* people, and also more recent *Pakeha* (non *Maori*, of European descent) immigrants to the community. The *Maori* people have largely retained their

RC 022400

[1] I acknowledge and am grateful for the support of Takiwa School and community. Thanks also to Roger Dale, Susan Robertson, Phil Harrington, Joce Jesson, and my colleagues in the Education Centre at ACE, for comments on the content of this paper.

[2] All names for people and places, with the exception of New Zealand, are pseudonyms.

language and culture, and most *Maori* have strong links to at least one of the many *marae* in the community. *Pakeha* have gradually increased their numbers since the first arrivals in the late 19th century. The first *Pakeha* immigrants were missionaries, farmers and shipbuilders, they were followed by quite a large influx of 'hippies' during the 1970s, and more recently by people seeking an 'alternative' lifestyle away from the increasingly busy and competitive New Zealand cities.

While the Takiwa community may appear on the surface to be disparate, it has historically and consistently demonstrated an ability to unite for common community causes. An example of this was during the recent national health reforms[3]. Takiwa residents resisted the changes which were foisted upon other New Zealand communities - as a consequence people in Takiwa are among the few in New Zealand who continue to have access to totally free healthcare. This free healthcare is of particular importance in Takiwa as a high percentage of people are unemployed or on welfare benefits. Work opportunities are few within the community, and the illicit growing and selling of marijuana subsidises the income of a number of residents.

The richness and strength which is Takiwa centres on values and beliefs which can be traced from Maoridom, to the rural pre and post war communities, through to the counter-cultural movements of the 1970s and the post 1980 alternative philosophies. A venn diagram of uniting values and beliefs, showing set intersections, would demonstrate that the following are pivotal:

> community, peaceful relationships, equality and equity, non-violence, spirituality, non-pollution of the environment, green politics, health in all of its manifestations, music, cooperation, creativity, respect for and the valuing of difference, and a belief in the power of unity for common causes.

The research process I discuss centres on a case study of the politics of the development of an alternative learning unit within Takiwa School, an area school. Area schools are provided by the state in some New Zealand rural areas, and they provide for the education of students from the age of 5 to 18 years. The alternative unit within Takiwa School, which I call the '*Kiwi*' unit, was initiated by parents to cater mainly (but not solely) for the education of the children of the *Pakeha* alternative people. Of the parents, mainly women politicked for the initiative. Once the unit was established the parents voluntarily worked alongside teachers within the unit and became very involved in curriculum development, planning, assessment and evaluation. Part of the philosophy of the unit was for the children to learn in the surrounding community as well as the classroom - a considerable amount of time was therefore spent away from the school site. The pedagogy of the unit is informed by the Playcentre (a form of early childhood education) philosophy and it encompasses a progressivist style of education.

Two vertically grouped classes of students were taught in the *Kiwi* unit in 1994, and the *Kiwi* unit is now one of three parallel options available to Takiwa School children on an annual basis. The other two options are the Mainstream ('conventional' teaching) and the Whanau (*Maori* immersion unit).

My thesis is about what happened in Takiwa School from 1993 through to 1996, with emphasis on the conditions and motivations which enabled the process of innovation. The thesis encompasses my interpretation of the phenomenon. Thus the thesis is not an historical description as communicated by the *Kiwi* parents who started the initiative, or the account of the Chairperson of the Takiwa Board of Trustees. If these people had written the thesis then undoubtedly it would have been written differently - they each would have brought their own resources to the undertaking, they would each have written a

---

[3] The reforms in the New Zealand Health sector were an integral part of the move in New Zealand away from policies centred on a welfare state towards neo-liberal economic policies which minimised state involvement. These political and economic reforms (New Right) commenced in the mid 1980s and continue to this day.

different account. Their purposes for writing would have been different to my own. Selected theoretically-based constructions - my selections - of the discourse of the interviewees, analysis of archival data, and the political context and processes are evident in the thesis. The constructions have passed through a filter which is my frame of reference. Consequently my voice tells the story. My partiality and positioning are evident throughout the thesis in the theory and research I refer to, and in the standpoints I take. I am in the text (Jones 1992).

Although undoubtedly in the text, I was and am continually aware that 'qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world' (Stake 1994: 244). Takiwa School and the *Kiwi* people did not have to accommodate my research, I am the privileged one.

**Myself**

I am a middle-aged woman. I am a feminist. I am *Pakeha*. I am a teacher. I am a unionist. Like many New Zealanders I am anti-nuclear and anti-violence. My origins are working class, however I now consider myself to be middle class. All *Kiwi* parents and teachers share at least one of these attributes, many share more.

As a primary trained teacher, the large majority of my teaching experience (by choice) in education has been in a variety of teaching and management positions, mainly in what would now be labelled as Decile 1-3 schools[4]. These low decile schools have a pupil intake from mainly lower socio-economic groups, consequently many of the schools I have taught in include a high percentage of *Maori* students in their enrolments.

My educational history, then, is that I have experienced, as a pupil, a professional teacher, a professional leader, and an education sector unionist, the bureaucratic system of education prior to the 1987 reforms in education. I have also experienced the transition from the century-old former system of education to the current system. My life and academic work is now conducted as a constituent of a nation which has elected successive (post 1984) governments which are informed by what could be loosely described as New Right ideology. I have considerable disquiet about the 'losers' the manifestation of such ideology brings with it - people in poverty, and people unable to access healthcare and adequate education in particular. The majority of these 'losers' are women and children, and many are brown.

Being a feminist, for me, means that I am keenly aware of the patriarchal nature of society. This awareness, this acknowledgment of the power differential between women and men, means that I tend to focus my qualitative research practice in domains where I see hegemonic influences disempowering women, or women resisting/using their agency and making a difference. My preference is for the latter, and this research is no exception. The fact that the initiative was developed and is driven by strong women involved in a campaign for a better education for their children made the case attractive to me. In a sense I feel aligned with the *Kiwi* women, and I acknowledge a partial identification with their cause and struggle (Mies 1993).

---

[4] All schools in New Zealand are given (by the state) a decile ranking from 1-10. The rankings indicate the socio-economic status of the surrounding and contributing community. A low number indicates that a school has limited financial resources, a high number (eg 9-10) indicates a well resourced school in a high socio-economic area (Norris et al. 1994)

**My connections to Takiwa and the *Kiwi* programme**

I was successful in applying for the position of Associate Principal in Takiwa School and took up this position in early 1986. Takiwa School is a Decile 1 school, and approximately 60% of all enrolments are *Maori* children. My teaching and management position included responsibility for the entire primary part of the area school, and this comprised two thirds of the school intake (approximately 200 students). I remained in Takiwa School until the beginning of 1990, when I went fulltime to University to begin study for my Masters degree.

Scott (1995) states that we select our study out of convenience rather than theoretical promise, we tend therefore to study systems close to us in time and place. Scott also asserts that these familiar systems are the most difficult to see with fresh eyes. 'These systems co-opt and corrupt our vision because we are likely to share many of our subjects' beliefs and assumptions' (Scott 1995: 151). My personal history demonstrates that the latter contention is in fact a predicament for the research; Takiwa School is unequivocally a system which is close to me in time and place.

A further contention by Scott is that for a researcher to study a close system, as Takiwa School was for me, the researcher needs 'frame breaking experiences' (Scott 1995: 151). My frame breaking experience was to leave Takiwa and become immersed in the discipline of the Sociology of Education. The opportunities to reflect on my ongoing teaching, and of being able to see my pedagogy, and school systems generally, through various pairs of theoretical lenses and research examples have impacted on all which I now investigate. My immersion in critical theory has meant using the analytical tools of structure and agency, with concurrent emphasis on reproduction and resistance. As a consequence of theoretical immersion the way I observe 'the other' in the research process is undoubtedly with a considerable form of power at times.

Notwithstanding the fact that I have now lived in Auckland for nine years, I find that I regularly return to the people, and the community. Like many other ex-Takiwa residents I find that 'the place' calls me back. The beauty, fresh air and friendships of Takiwa are, for me, very seductive. Helen and Sue were the initial teachers in the *Kiwi* unit, I first met these women in Takiwa during my Takiwa School teaching appointment and I now consider both of these women to be my friends. I was the staff representative on the initial Board of Trustees in Takiwa School; Ben (the BOT chairperson during the research process) was also an elected member of that initial Board of Trustees. The principal during my final two years in the school remained the principal of Takiwa School throughout most of the research process. Many of the numerous people who are integral to the study are either friends, professional colleagues, or old acquaintances. I now live in Auckland but nevertheless continue to socialise with many Takiwa people, especially the women, but also the young people I have taught. When I go back to Takiwa it feels as if I am going home and it is possible that I will live in Takiwa again at some stage of my life.

**Methodology**

The thesis is an interpretivist account:

> ....social and educational research is not scientific in the standard (ie empiricist or positivist) sense of the term. To the contrary, interpretivists see research as an eminently practical and moral activity that shares much in common with, or is continuous with, other forms of inquiry.....interpretivists think it is time to dispense with the long-standing claim that the knowledge of researchers is inevitably

> superior to, and thus can stand automatically in judgement of, the knowledge of others, such as parents and teachers....our understanding of what it means to be rational is no longer confined to our understanding of what it means to be scientific (Smith 1992a: 100).

As a result of looking, participating, reading, analysis and reflection, the thesis is written primarily to contribute to the discipline of the Sociology of Education. The purpose of the thesis is to elucidate the process of a phenomenon which happened, a phenomenon which, by its telling and ensuing personal reflection on the part of the reader, could enhance education and learning for other communities in New Zealand and abroad.

The constructions evident in the thesis are informed by critical realism and are based around the central sociological theories of Exit, Voice and Loyalty (Hirschman 1970) and New Institutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). These two central theories are used to examine the process of school change from a political and organisational perspective. My contention is that the larger social structure plays an enormous part in the determining of what is possible; the personal and the community are political. As a critical theorist I am aware of the effects of power; I also believe that people can only attempt or actually do what they please under particular circumstances (Marx) (See for instance Fine 1997). Both structure and agency, therefore, are implicated in the process of change in Takiwa School:

> Institutions set the limits on the very nature of rationality, and individuality, but individuals, groups and organisations try to use institutional orders to their own advantage (Friedland and Alford 1991: 251).

I am committed to the enablement and empowerment of communities through their participation in activities and processes (especially in education) which solve their own problems. Unquestionably the emancipatory work of Freire (1972) has partially contributed to the shape of my theoretical frames, and more recent work which draws on the Freirean themes of enablement and empowerment (see for instance Apple and Beane 1995; Corson 1998; Peters and Marshall 1996; Smith 1992b). An understanding of the politics of the process - perhaps helped by my research activity - could lead to further empowerment of the Takiwa participants and other communities.

**The project and the process**

The empirical work in this case study was entirely qualitative in its nature; it encompassed ethnographic work and this enabled a close analysis of the site and its complexities. These methods were chosen as they best enabled the answering of the questions which arose before, during and after the casing process. The study of the case was the 'way station in the process' (Ragin 1992: 224-225) of producing this thesis, and the completion in of this thesis brings a measure of closure to 'vaguely formulated theoretical' (Ragin and Becker 1992: 220) ideas.

As in many case studies there was no hypothesis in this case study. In case studies it is illegitimate to generalise beyond the particular case. Consequently there is no intent in this case to make causal connections or unfounded generalisations, for instance to the effect that 'if certain conditions and motivations prevail then a *Kiwi* clone is possible'. Having said that, I am mindful that particular individuals or groups will take what they desire from the case study and, compounded by their own dispositions, may make changes within their own contexts.

The empirical work within the school included classroom and school observations, group and individual interviews, facilitation of internal evaluation processes, in-service education for parents and teachers, relief/substitute teaching on occasions, and the analysis of archival material. I spent blocks of 2-5 days in the school throughout the years from 1994 until 1998 inclusive, and communicated over that time in person and by letter, fax, e-mail and telephone with various people from the school and community. I twice arranged and went with *Kiwi* teachers to observe in a variety of state and private 'alternative' city schools; this was part of the teachers' 'in-service professional development'.

**Ethics**

The University of Auckland Human Subjects Ethics Committee gave formal approval for this research project to be carried out. As the geographic area of Takiwa has immense spiritual and geographic significance for *Maori* people, and many of the research subjects are *Maori*, an academic adviser was requested for any *Maori* components of the research. The work of the formal adviser was complemented by advice I sought from *Maori* people - tangata whenua - in Takiwa, and also from *Maori* academics at the Auckland College of Education.

The Board of Trustees in Takiwa School gave formal written permission for the PhD research to be undertaken. A written undertaking was given by me to the BOT that I would not publish the name of the school or the community without its consent. This undertaking, however, does not mean that the school is unidentifiable - those with an intimate knowledge of New Zealand schools would need few detective skills to identify Takiwa as there are less than 30 area schools in rural communities and even fewer with the ethnic population of Takiwa School. I trust those readers will respect the fact that the thesis is more an abstract discussion of educational issues rather than a critique of Takiwa School processes, and as a consequence respect the confidentiality requested by the Takiwa BOT.

While an undertaking was made that no actual names or nameplaces would be used in the research, individuals who could perhaps be identified by people within Takiwa School or community were informed of this fact. These people were senior management people on Takiwa staff (ie the principal, deputy principal and associate principal), the key entrepreneurs in the *Kiwi* initiative, the four *Kiwi* teachers and the BOT chairperson. Interviewees referred to in the research gave informed and written consent, and transcripts were returned to interviewees for their perusal. Occasionally interviewees added further notes to the transcripts as well as making minor alterations. Interviewees were informed in writing that they could withdraw from the research at any time without providing reasons. Nobody chose to do this over the four year period.

**Assets and liabilities of my 'insider' perspective**

Research such as mine is inevitably full of complexities. Bruner (cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994) described controversies which surround qualitative research:

> The qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text.
>
> The qualitative researcher is 'historically positioned and locally situated (as) an all-too-human (observer) of the human condition'
>
> Meaning is 'radically plural, always open, and ...there is politics in every account' (Bruner, 1993: 1 cited in Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

My personal history can be construed as both an asset and a liability in the research process. My conversations, or research interviews, in Takiwa were constrained by my personal identity which preceded me to the research process. While my Takiwa history gave me permission to carry out the research it also affected who would or would not engage in conversation/interviews, and the content of what was or was not shared. Some people who chose to be interviewed took the opportunity to share thoughts and feelings which were perhaps not safe to share within the formal school structures, others told me only what they thought I should hear, some shared their career plans, some criticised their colleagues, others shared their concerns about their children.

As a consequence of the above, the line between formal research interviews and general conversation became, at times, rather indistinct. The following example may illustrate the dilemma. A Takiwa teacher phoned me to ask a question about Education Review Office processes. The person then proceeded to recount issues to do with the *Kiwi* programme. Was the information which was shared (regarding the *Kiwi* programme) research data or social conversation? Burgess (1985) faced similar ethical dilemmas in Bishop McGregor School and suggested that his own conduct was far from exemplary. His solution was to make public the ethical and political problems which he encountered in his research to demonstrate how compromise could be reached and knowledge advanced while protecting 'informants'.

The information and thoughts shared by interviewees often depended on whether the interviewees positioned me as 'one of them', or as a visitor/researcher; put in another way it depended on whether the interviewees saw me as an insider, or as an outsider. In the case study of Takiwa School I am both an insider and an outsider, and therefore I am subject to specific ethical dilemmas which accompany research process similar to this one. As Jones (1992) and others (see for example Lather 1991; Matthews 1993; Middleton 1993; Weiler 1988) have argued, it is impossible for researchers to be detached from their objects of analysis. Morris- Matthew's (1993: 40) research into women in New Zealand universities indicated that she was a 'knowledgeable insider, sympathetic to the teaching of academic women's studies and the generation of feminist research'. It was not possible for Morris-Matthews to 'assume the position of neutral outsider'.

Like Morris-Matthews with her research in universities, in Takiwa I am also a 'knowledgeable insider'. I have a good understanding of the Takiwa School structures and systems. From the outset I was sympathetic to what it was that the *Kiwi* parents were trying to accomplish within Takiwa School, and how difficult that process could be. I wanted the innovation to succeed. Partially as a result of this desire, during the research process I worked voluntarily for the school as a relief teacher on occasions, and I also facilitated a workshop and two evaluation meetings for the *Kiwi* parents.

I was simultaneously an outsider. My status as an outsider was one reason I was invited to be a part of the *Kiwi* unit formal evaluation process. As an observer one looks 'differently' at the scenario, at least differently to how one would look if one was intimately involved in the processes of the school and community. Consequently, I 'recognised' because I had been there, but 'watched' in a particular way because I had departed. I missed much of what another would have seen, and saw and heard much of what yet another might not have seen:

> So, when we map we miss. We miss the gap between representation and image represented. We miss the contrivance of the representational practices that produce the effect of representation. We miss the point if we think that what we see is what we see. What we see is a representation of a phenomenon, with technical, aesthetic, experiential presence and absence. What we miss is what we don't see. We don't see the history that produces this structuring of space and time, this representational mismatch of spaces, environments, activities, sounds, symbols, scents and sights.

> But..... conversations help us understand what we don't see. Conversations help us see the figures in the landscape, moving through it, retreating to its margins, filling it with their voices, their anxieties, their emotions, their feelings, their beauty and the ghosts that haunt them: their ancestors, both literal and real (Clegg and Hardy 1996: 676).

Vaughan (1992: 198) states that in order to evaluate insider data, the researcher not only must be informed about the context, but must know the source of the data as thoroughly as possible, must wonder why people agreed to be involved, and must consider how information was chosen to be given to the interviewer. My contention is that my particular positioning made the evaluation of insider data more effective. It was possible for me to 'screen out' peripheral material, and also to sieve information so that the knowledge which was ultimately selected for the case tells the story with the minimum of harm to any participants. Vaughan also maintains that insider data be balanced by the incorporation of the perspectives of outsiders; in this case study the outsiders fulfilling this role are my supervisors and *Maori* advisers.

**Objectivity**

The complexities of the research process which are described in 'At School I've got a Chance' (Jones 1991), and other readings such as those in Denzin and Lincoln (1994), have helped embed in me an understanding that positivism and objectivity in research are profoundly problematic. Researchers take their biases (which can be reframed as resources, (see Olesen 1994)) into the research process, and these historical and contemporary resources colour the individual 'framed pictures' which finally emerge in published form. Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991) described the dual tasks of trying to be objective while dealing with the relationships between the researcher and the research participants.

Possible objectivity on my part was not proclaimed, but neither was it publicly disclaimed during the research process. The discourse surrounding research is that it is 'objective'. As a consequence, 'objective researcher assumptions' on the part of some interviewees were apparent - and caused some misunderstandings - during aspects of the triangulation process. Considerable dialogue became necessary at times to clarify my position.

For this tale to have credibility far more than my own veracity was required. As noted, drafts of individual chapters were circulated as they were compiled and many *Kiwi* parents, and Takiwa teaching staff, took the opportunity to comment on my writings and interpretations. Policing the boundaries meant opening up my interpretations to the subjects, and finding that the tables could turn and I could become the subject - as 'their' analysis meant critiquing my own subjectivity. My 'truth' was challenged and was not authoritative with some of those who were researched. For example an issue of interpretation arose in my description of the *Kiwi* community. While some found the description 'alternative' - with philosophical links to the 1970s Takiwa hippy community - unproblematic, others could see few connections and were opposed to this interpretation. A clear demarcation became necessary, on my part, between fact and description/interpretation.

Account was taken of the multiple Takiwa School responses to individual chapters. Account was also taken of feedback from others involved in the triangulation process. In August 1999 three copies of a complete Draft were mailed to Takiwa School, and soon after I spent four days in the community for the express purpose of consultation. My diary of this visit demonstrates that the only concern expressed to me at that stage was that Playcentre should have a capital 'P'. The oral feedback was invariably

positive from the people who had read the Draft. Ten people had read right through the work and others were on 'waiting lists' for the three copies.

Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1991) ask if it is possible to explain the life of others without violating their reality. My response is that, in the case of the Takiwa research, it was not possible. In fact I believe it never could be possible when the involvement is with human subjects. All one can do in cases like mine is to take reality checks where possible, as part of the triangulation process, then trust that the 'others' will understand and respect the dilemma of the process. Acker, Barry and Esseveld state that it 'is impossible to create a research process that erases the contradictions (in power and consciousness) between researcher and researched' (op. cit1991: 150). A question I must ask myself is whose interests were being served by me 'opening up my interpretations'. Mine - because the openness was required for ethical/validity/triangulation reasons, or to elicit added 'richness' for my data? Or theirs - because? (Page et al. 1998)

Tensions are inevitable; tensions in particular between different understandings of what are the 'truths', and tensions in the explanations of these 'truths'. In the final analysis matters of fact were readily altered if participants believed them to be incorrect, but the interpretation had to remain my own, grounded in my theoretical readings:

> If validity is to be judged by the adequacy of interpretation, we must return to our theoretical orientation to determine the criteria of adequacy (Acker et al. 1983: 431).

My personal history undoubtedly did affect and perhaps skew the research results, but with few exceptions my contention is that the positive effects far outweighed the negative. The tension/dilemma for me as the researcher was between being an advocate and, at times, understanding the need to be silent in order to protect people. My guiding principle was to tell the truth and at the same time meet an ethical obligation to minimise harm. I discovered that it was possible in the thesis to address the questions raised without the sharing of all of the 'truths' I heard.

**Conclusion**

Acker et al. (1991) describe three criteria of adequacy: the active voice of the subject should be heard, the theoretical reconstruction must be able to account for the investigator as well as for those who are investigated, and the reconstruction should reveal the underlying social relations that eventuate in the daily lives we are studying. On the basis of Acker, Barry and Esseveld's description, I contend that there is validity in my presentation of the change process in Takiwa School.

This paper and the thesis, however, provide selected evidence which demonstrates that my research in Takiwa School was neither fully objective nor fully neutral. The research was as 'objective' as it was possible for me to make it, but my biases, my self, my Takiwa history, my dilemmas, and my methodology all compounded to inform my version of the truth. In turn, my friendships and my social construction as a teacher and a woman mean that my neutrality is open to critical examination.

This paper describes the selected and particular personal frames and theoretical lenses which I was looking through when I conducted my research in Takiwa School. While I am being as honest and open as possible with my writing at this particular point in time, this paper is of necessity an abbreviated, altered and edited small part of the whole thesis. This paper has not covered all of the questions which may arise regarding 'truth'. As I continue to read around my topic, or am involved in discussion, or

merely take time to reflect, my position is likely to change. Is this problematic? Does this make my research any less valuable? My answer to both of these questions is no.

Different and contradictory truths can be told from my data, I have merely told one 'truth'. No other researcher would have worked in the way I worked, would have asked the questions I asked, read the material I read, moved in the school in the way I moved. No other researcher has the history I have in the Takiwa School and the Takiwa community, no one else has lived my life and takes my 'baggage' to the analysis. My ratiocination is unique, it encompasses my truth alone, my subjectivity.

My suggestion is that all educational research processes, whether quantitative, qualitative, 'positivist' or interpretivist, are neither objective nor neutral. It matters that researchers acknowledge their biases, their subjectivity. This acknowledgment does not, however, absolve one of ethical responsibilities or of the requirement for validity. The reader of the research needs knowledge of the researcher to fully interpret and make use of any findings. Not informing the reader of 'where you are coming from' simply asks the reader to enter an objective utopia in which, I contend, any validity claimed is contentious.

References:


Acker, Joan, Kate Barry, and Joke Esseveld. 1983. "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in doing Feminist Research." *Women's Studies Int. Forum* 6: 423-435.

Acker, J, K Barry, and J Esseveld. 1991. "Objectivity and Truth: Problems in doing feminist research." Pp. 133-153 in *Beyond Methodology: Feminist scholarship as lived research*, edited by M M Fonow and J A Cook. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Apple, Michael, and James A Beane, eds. 1995. *Democratic Schools*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Burgess, R G. 1985. "The Whole Truth? Some Ethical Problems of Research in a Comprehensive School." in *Field Methods in the Study of Education*, edited by R G Burgess. East Sussex: Falmer.

Clegg, Stewart R, and Cynthia Hardy. 1996. "Conclusion: Representations." Pp. 676-708 in *Handbook of Organization Studies*, edited by Stewart R Clegg, Cynthia Hardy and Walter R Nord. London: Sage Publications.

Corson, David. 1998. *Changing Education for Diversity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denzin, Norman K, and Yvonna S Lincoln, eds. 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Fine, Michelle. 1997. "(Ap)parent Involvement: Reflections on Parents, Power, and Urban Public Schools." Pp. 460-475 in *Education. Culture, Economy and Society*, edited by A H Halsey, Hugh Lauder, Phillip Brown and Amy Stuart Wells. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freire, Paulo. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books.

Friedland, Roger, and Robert R Alford. 1991. "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions." Pp. 232-263 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W Powell and Paul J DiMaggio. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hirschman, Albert O. 1970. *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Jones, Alison. 1991. *"At School I've Got a Chance"*. Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Jones, Alison. 1992. "Writing feminist educational research: Am `I' in the text." in *Women and Education in Aotearoa 2*, edited by Sue Middleton and Alison Jones. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.

Lather, Patti. 1991. *Getting Smart. Feminist Research and Pedagogy with in the Postmodern*. London: Routledge.

Matthews, Kay Morris. 1993. "For and About Women: Womens's Studies in New Zealand Universities 1973-1990." PhD thesis, unpublished, History Department, Hamilton: University of Waikato.

Middleton, Sue. 1993. *Educating Feminists - Life Histories and Pedagogy*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Mies, Maria. 1993. "Towards a methodology for feminist research." Pp. 64-82 in *Social Research. Philosophy, Politics and Practice*, edited by Martyn Hammersley. London: Sage.

Norris, Marion, Michael Bathgate, and Michael Parkin. 1994. "Development of a Socio-economic Indicator for Schools." paper presented at *NZARE* conference. Christchurch.

Olesen, Virginia. 1994. "Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research." Pp. 158-174 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Page, Reba N, Yvette J Samson, and Michele D Crockett. 1998. "Reporting Ethnography to Informants." *Harvard Educational Review* 68: 299-333.

Peters, Michael, and James Marshall. 1996. *Individualism and Community: Education and Social Policy in the Postmodern Condition*. London: Falmer Press.

Powell, Walter, and Paul DiMaggio, eds. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in organizational analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ragin, C, and H Becker, eds. 1992. *What is a case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ragin, Charles C. 1992. ""Casing" and the process of social inquiry." Pp. 217-226 in *What is a case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, edited by Charles C Ragin and Howard S Becker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, W Richard. 1995. *Institutions and Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Ltd.

Smith, J K. 1992a. "Interpretive Inquiry: A Practical and Moral Activity." *Theory into Practice* 3: 100-106.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1992b. "Kura Kaupapa Maori and the Implications for Curriculum." Pp. 219-231 in *The School Curriculum in New Zealand: History, Theory, Policy and Practice*, edited by Gary McCulloch. Palmerston North: Dunmore.

Stake, Robert E. 1994. "Case Studies." Pp. 236-247 in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln. California: Sage Publications.

Tonnies, Ferdinand. 1955. *Community and Association*: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Vaughan, Diane. 1992. "Theory elaboration, the heuristics of case analysis." Pp. 173-202 in *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*, edited by C Ragin and H Becker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Weiler, Kathleen. 1988. *Women teaching for change*. Massachussets: Bergin & Garvey.